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Craig Belshe

July 14, 2007

Location: Estes Park Museum

Betty Kilsdonk: This interview is taking place on July 14, 2007, in the Estes Park Museum as part of a series called Estes Park: A Study of Growth. Please state your full name and long you lived in Estes Park.

Craig Belshe: My name's Craig Belshe and I lived in Estes Park from 1976 until 2005; I left after 29 years of being in Estes Park.

Betty Kilsdonk: Why did you choose to move to Estes Park?

Craig Belshe: I came to Estes Park back in the mid-'70s to be the manager of Stanley Park Pool, the pool that used to be located where Stanley Park is now, right where the youth center is now. There was a swimming pool there and I was working for both the recreation district and the school district.

Interestingly enough, I came to town . . . the reason I came was there was a tragedy the year before where there was a child who was a middle school child who had drowned in the pool during school time. It was a major tragedy in the community and there was a lot of upheaval going on at the pool.

I had graduated from college and I was working as a substitute teacher down in the Denver area and was looking for opportunities and I applied for the position up here and, frankly, I didn't think I'd ever get the job—there was a lot of tension and a lot of pressure on related to this position, related to what had happened the year before. Quite frankly, I was the only one who'd had the qualifications. They were looking for somebody that had a teaching license and also somebody that had pool experience and I had spent summers during the time I was in college managing a swimming pool. So I had both pieces of experience.

I interviewed for the job with a variety of people—I interviewed with the superintendent of schools at the time, Herb Wanger [sp]. I also interviewed with the high school principal, a gentleman named Gordon Rudle [sp], and interviewed with a gentleman named Bob Deers [sp], who was the head of the recreation district. And after I interviewed, I didn't hear anything for about two weeks, and frankly, I didn't think I got the job. And then I got a call and had the job offer and I moved to Estes Park.

Betty Kilsdonk: How old were you at that time?

Craig Belshe: I was 22 years of age. And the first place that I lived . . . and I came into

town and was looking for housing and I moved into a place that was right when you're coming into Estes, right as you're coming across . . . right before the causeway. I lived in a single-room . . . essentially, a cabin. It had a main living room area and just a small bedroom and a little kitchen area. I just came to town and I did not know a soul. I didn't know anybody.

First . . . when I came into town, the first week I came into town, I got a note in the mail from George Hix, the president of the bank, welcoming me to Estes Park. I didn't know anybody. No connections at all.

Betty Kilsdonk: So that was 1976, is that correct?

Craig Belshe: It was.

Betty Kilsdonk: So let's take a walk down Elkhorn Avenue in your mind's eye in 1976. Let's just walk down Elkhorn and tell me what you remember.

Craig Belshe: I really remember the wintertime more than I do the summertime, going down Elkhorn Avenue at that period of time, because it was so much different as far as just the downtown area and the configuration of downtown. It was before the Lawn Lake Flood and the downtown area looked so much different.

And quite frankly, Estes Park at that period of time was a summer tourism industry and there wasn't the shoulder season of winter going on at all. Downtown in the wintertime, predominately in the streets . . . the streets . . . the windows in the shops would be newspapered, white-painted over; they were closed down. There was nothing going on. And as a young person, at 22 or 23 years of age, when I . . . I would walk out of the Wheel Bar at 9:00 on a Friday night and look up and down the street, literally, and not see a soul. It was so much more of a small town atmosphere.

The town, in 1976, there was more connections . . . it was a little bit smaller and it seemed like it didn't take very long where you'd get to see the same people over and over and start to make connections right off the bat.

But the downtown area, particularly as it looks physically, was completely different than it looks today.

Betty Kilsdonk: And so returning to Estes Park, as you did this morning, how is it different today?

Craig Belshe: It's so much busier. The increase—traffic flow, people, the number of

people who are visiting Estes Park—that stair-stepped literally every single year where it would continue to get busier and busier. To the point in time that when I lived here, I would not go downtown very often in the summer unless I was going downtown for something specific because it would be so busy and crowded.

I was very relieved when the bypass was built over by the hospital to bypass around the downtown area because at one point in time, I was living out in the High Drive area, and if I was going out of town to do anything I always had to drive through town and it was getting to be more and more cumbersome to get through town because of just the increased traffic flow and the number of people. And frankly, it's so much busier and more active . . . and more beautiful, too, as far as the buildings and the structures and the shops, the street designs, the stoplights, the light ways, the directional things. It's so much more sophisticated than it was back that many years ago.

Betty Kilsdonk: Let's talk a little more about your career with the school. You had many positions with the school system. As you said, you started as a teacher, you ended up being a principal of the middle school and the high school and the intermediate school at various times. What changes did you see in the school system from . . . during your career, for both good and bad?

Craig Belshe: There were a lot of things that changed in the school district. The high school . . . when I came to town in 1976, the high school had just been opened the year before. It had just opened in 1975 and so it was a brand new facility.

And I was teaching at the middle school when I was first teaching in the school district. Because the year after I came with the Stanley Park Pools, in the middle of the winter that year, there was an agreement, interestingly enough, very similar to what we're going through now in Estes Park. There was an agreement between the school district and the rec district about operating costs. And at that period of time, the recreation district owned the pool and the school district was contributing expenses related to revenue. Well, a bond issue had gone . . . or, a mill levy override issue had gone to the taxpayers in November of that first year that I was here and the taxpayers didn't pass it. And that had never really happened to the schools in Estes Park before so they ended up having to start to cut back on expenses. So what happened—the pool closed. And that was my job. So I was under a contract for the rest of that year and so they put me to work at the middle school teaching physical education at the middle school, and that was the position I held for about six years.

At that period of time, in the school district, literally all of the teachers in

the school district lived in Estes Park and lived in the community area around Estes Park. And over a period of time, particularly with the increased cost of housing you saw in the Estes Park area, it became more and more difficult for young teachers to come to Estes Park and live here.

So the biggest change that I saw over a period of time was that there was a real community feel to the school district when I first came, and that was becoming eroded over a period of time because more and more of the people that were working in the school district were literally driving from Longmont or Lyons or Boulder. I had . . . when I was the high school principal here in Estes Park, I had staff members that lived in Fort Collins, Boulder, Loveland, Longmont, and Lyons—all the way across the Front Range areas. And they were driving up here and they would drive up for one of two reasons—either they had a spouse that was working a different job where they were at in the valley or, quite frankly, they couldn't afford the economics of moving into the housing market in Estes Park. So that was a huge change that happened and I think the schools lost a little bit of that . . . you were more a part of it when you lived here and you knew all the children and worked here rather than just driving up and doing my job for the day and driving back down. So that was a big change that I saw.

Another change that I saw probably had to do with finances. When I first came to the Estes Park schools in the late '70s, basically there was a . . . seemed to be a lot of income as far as coming into the school district. And if you wanted something—you wanted something to work into your program, you wanted some kind of supply material, you wanted to have something for your program—pretty much all you had to do was ask.

And then what happened in the 1980s is there was a change statewide in the state funding of schools and they got into an equalization formula. Before that period of time, the tax-wealthy towns and communities had a lot more resources in their schools, and if you had a poor tax base in your school or community, you had a hard time supporting your school and resources.

Well, there was state equalization that happened—that they wanted children all over the state of Colorado to have the same kind of benefits. And that really had a little bit of a negative impact on Estes Park. We stopped receiving state equalization because we were receiving lots of property taxes here and all of a sudden, going through the '80s, I think the district went through a lot more financial difficulty than it did when I first came in the '70s.

Betty Kilsdonk:

Is there one accomplishment or a few accomplishments that you look to when you think back on your career here that you're most proud of?

Craig Belshe:

You know, I had an interesting thing happen to me when I was leaving. I received a recognition the last year that I was here in Estes Park, and it was a national-level recognition for principals. And that was probably the most incredible experience that ever happened to me as a person. Because what happened is that by nature of the Internet and information resources and things going out, people received this news that I received this recognition. And I heard from students from back in the '70s and '80s and literally coast to coast—kids that I had not seen for 25 or 30 years that I had contact with when I was probably 22 or 23 years old. I would get letters from them, I got e-mails from them, I'd hear about their families, about the kind of impact that I might have had on them during the period of time they were in school.

So I think in terms of my time here in Estes Park, in schools they always say that you basically are touching the future, and it's kind of a cliché that people talk about. I had that impact come back to me and it has been the most dramatic impact in my life because I heard from all these students that I hadn't seen in a long, long time and heard how well their lives were going and what was happening with them. It was absolutely the biggest impact in my life.

Betty Kilsdonk:

About the time that you left, there was some trauma at the school. The superintendent was indicted and arrested and convicted—and imprisoned, actually, in 2005—of embezzlement. And about the same time, the middle school bookkeeper was also arrested for theft and embezzlement. Do you have any reflections that you'd like to share about that period of time at the school?

Craig Belshe:

It was a really difficult period of time in the school. Even leading back before the embezzlement situation happened with the superintendent, that superintendent had really been bought out of his contract by the school board.

There were some very difficult working years where there was a poor relationship between the board of education and the superintendent of schools. And that had really made the working conditions, particularly for the administrative staff in the district, to be increasingly more difficult. There were board members that were at odds with the superintendent over his operating style and his management style. And the last couple of times that his contract was renewed, it was renewed on a split vote, where he would be barely renewed into his contract. So there were some members of the board that really completely disagreed with the philosophy of the superintendent at the time and wanted to see him out.

And what ended up happening . . . it's interesting, what ended up being his undoing. What happened was that the last time he had his contract renewed, it was on 3-2 vote in his favor. There was a board member at the time, Gail Fray, who was a long-time teacher in the school district and had retired in the school district, and her husband, Ray, became ill and they had to move to Longmont. So he had to resign her position on the board and then the board ended up appointing another person. A few months after the board made that appointment, the power on the board split; it slid the other direction from being 3-2 in favor of the superintendent to 3-2 against the superintendent. And so he ended up leaving.

So long before the embezzlement . . . he was gone from his position as superintendent before the embezzlement was uncovered. They found that out after he was out . . . after they'd removed him from office and they had a temporary interim superintendent that was there.

So the working relationship between the superintendent and board had a really negative and debilitating effect on the school district that was permeating, and that was going on for a few years.

In terms of the impact on me personally, I think it was certainly the impetus that made me start to think about making changes in my career and looking at other opportunities. Because it was becoming increasingly more . . . it didn't have the same kind of atmosphere and environment to work in that it did when I was working most of my years in Estes Park. There were a lot of changes going on in the district and I had made a decision that it was probably best that I moved along so they could go along and move in the direction that they wanted to move.

Betty Kilsdonk: While you were here, you were a member of many community and school organizations; really part of the community. You volunteered for many activities. Which of those kinds of things were the most meaningful to you, and why?

Craig Belshe: Well, I've had to think about that a little bit. I think a couple of organizations that I was involved with—that would include the Parents and Community for Kids; that'd be PaCK. And then the Bobcat Athletic Club, the BAC'ers. I was on the initial boards that formed both those groups that are still going on today. So when you see something. . . . PaCK was formed probably . . . it's been well over 20 years ago that PaCK was formed. And the BAC'ers were formed longer than that; they were formed about 1982, I think—the BAC'ers were.

And so when you see an organization that just a few of you start talking about to try and benefit kids and try and have a positive influence on kids

in the community and what can happen with them in the community and then you look back 20 or 25 years later and the organizations are still carrying on and moving out, it's satisfying to know that something that you were involved in the very startup on is continuing on and still having a great impact on kids. So I'd say that those two in particular.

When we started PaCK, it started in the living room of Jim and Penny Ranglos, who are long-time residents here in Estes Park and they're both passed away now. And they ran the Glacier Lodge and they had worked with a couple of people in the school district and they want to try and reestablish some of those relationships that I talked about earlier where you had a real community feel in the school district.

And the original thing that we'd done with PaCK was we had asked parents to get involved in a pledge, basically related to kids and behavior that, "If I see your child doing something that they probably shouldn't be doing, I'll contact you. And if you see mine, will you contact me, too?" And we tried to get the community to tie into that kind of an aspect so that parents would have a real close eye on what was happening with their children and young adults in the community. And that was really the start of it. And I can remember having those discussions in that living room, and basically we just drew up some bylaws and decided we were going to start an organization and then it just started to move along from there.

But the Rangloses were significant in their influence in the community because Jim had been on the school board and they were very active in the town and community, so I think that they were able to pull in some resources from other places that the schools weren't aware of because they were in the lodging business.

Betty Kilsdonk: So if you had to name what you thought was your most significant contribution to the Estes Park community while you were here, would you say that or would there be something else that you would mean?

Craig Belshe: I would say it was the impact on people. In education, it's a people business. It's funny, some of the work that I do outside of education, like working on your own home, you complete a project and you see it and it's done, and you see the fruits of your labor or your work. And in the school business, frequently you don't.

What's happening in schools right now is people are trying to make a real strong effort to quantify student achievement, and what we're trying to do is measure human potential. And there's a lot of danger in that—trying to measure human potential. And we're doing it in some very narrow corridors.

And I think that when you work with people, your hope would be that you would instill confidence and a belief that they would have in themselves that they would be able to move on and do things in their own lives that they're capable of doing that all of us need somewhere along the line.

In my own life, it was a coach that influenced me even to get into education, and I think that all he really did for me was told me that he believed in me and that I could do these things and showed a lot of confidence and gave me a boost. And I think that when you do that with people, that you hope that that has an impact.

So I would think . . . I would hope my greatest impact would have been on the people that I was having contact with, mostly the students and the kids that I worked with over the period of time up here.

Betty Kilsdonk: Estes Park has people that we regard as historic treasures—Charles Eagle Plume, Casey Martin . . . who did you feel in the community was a historic treasure and that you got to know while you lived here?

Craig Belshe: Well, when I came, Casey Martin was no longer in the school district but he was . . . his shadow was still way over the school district. And so he was talked about frequently in the school district when I came.

I met Charlie Eagle Plume. I was out at his business and I had met him on a few different occasions, and very interesting character as far as talking and meeting with him.

I would say in the era that I was in here, the influence in the town of Estes Park was mostly in the town government areas. And I had the privilege of knowing the entire set of mayors when I was here—that I had met and even talked with each one of them individually and personally. I knew Ron Brodie, I knew Harry Tregent, I knew Bernie Dannels, John Baudek, and all the mayors during the period of time I was here I had contact with and really enjoyed each one of them individually, and also the impact that they had on the town and community. Because I think all of them were very significant.

I have to share a story about Ron Brodie while I'm here. Because in the Barlow Plaza area of downtown, that was where Brodie's Supermarket used to be. And that was long before Safeway was here, and Brodie's Supermarket was just a mom-and-pop operation, supermarket, in town. The middle school principal at the time, Steve Peterson, was actually a butcher there in the summer and cut meat for a side job.

So I started doing shopping down at Brodie's and I wasn't in town more than two or three months before Mr. Brodie extended me the opportunity if I wanted to start buying my groceries on credit. And he did this for a number of people in the community. And I didn't have to because I was fortunate; I was in a situation that I was paid monthly and was paid year-round.

But Ron Brodie . . . there were a number of people, since it was a summer tourism economy, that based their money just entirely on what was happening in the summer and winters were very, very skinny for a lot of people who were in business here in Estes Park during that period of time. And Ron Brodie carried a lot of people financially during the winter and would actually extend store credit to them and then when the summer months would start coming in and they'd start making money again, they would pay him back.

And you think of that, just in a small town feel, and would that happen in Estes Park today? I don't think so. I think life has changed since the '70s when somebody would just do that on a handshake. And a young 22-year-old kid comes into town and, "Do you want to have credit in my store?" I don't think anybody who moved to Estes Park would have that today.

Betty Kilsdonk: What was Harry Tregent like?

Craig Belshe: Harry Tregent was kind of a reserved gentleman—very business-like, almost a little bit stoic as far as how he worked. But he was very . . . I guess what you would say is very caring for others. He was a very concerned, caring individual as far as working with others, and you could feel it when you were with him or talking with him. A very nice man.

Betty Kilsdonk: You were here during the Lawn Lake Flood, in 1982. What do you remember it and its impact on Estes Park?

Craig Belshe: The Lawn Lake Flood—during the Lawn Lake Flood, that summer, I was actually . . . I was in my last year as a teacher before I became an administrator and my summer job was . . . I was working at the Wheel Bar. I spent a number of summers at the Wheel Bar. I was actually a waiter at Orlando's Steakhouse for a couple of summers and I bartended at the Wheel Bar, I think, for three different summers. So I was bartending at the Wheel Bar during the period of time.

When the flood actually happened, I was the high school basketball coach here in Estes Park, and I had a team up at the University of Wyoming at team camp during the week. And I got a telephone call about the flood and this flood had happened. And I was very puzzled by it, thinking, "Where

would a flood happen in downtown Estes Park? Where would this flood come from?" At that point in time, I was living on Stanley Circle Drive, which was fairly close to the downtown area, and I'm thinking, "Well, is my house flooded? Where could water come from?"

So I came back home from the basketball camp—I left Laramie, Wyoming, and came back home—and saw the devastation of the flood and what had happened to the downtown area. And I was working at the Wheel so I ended up going into town and actually was in the bottom of the Wheel Bar with Steve Nagl, who was running the bar at the time, and O. M. Nagl—Orlando Nagl—who was down there. And we literally had shovels and we were in the basement of that bar and the mud had to be six to 12 inches deep in spots. And we were taking it, shovel by shovel, in wheelbarrows and rolling it out of the lower part of that bar.

They had their entire inventory of bottles and everything that were in the lower level of that bar and, of course, it was all condemned because it was all contaminated at that period of time. And I can remember people from the department of health coming up and we were behind the Wheel, which is now in the walkway area—it wasn't there. And people that worked at that bar sat there on hours from end, and the health department coming by and checking on us, opening up beer bottle after beer bottle just because it was contaminated and the health department wanted to make sure that this didn't get transferred and go somewhere else, even for somebody to take it home and put it in their own refrigerator at home. So we worked on that.

Steve Nagl was very, very proud of the fact that the Wheel Bar was the first business that reopened in downtown Estes Park after the flood. And it was really one of those community heartwarming things after the flood happened, because all of those business owners in town who were just devastated as far as their personal lives and their business by this flood came in there. They were working 10 or 12 hours a day, and Steve Nagl opened the doors and they were still cleaning up in there and the health department gave the okay to start bringing people in. And basically, it became a social refuge for these people who were going through tremendous turmoil in their lives.

So all those business owners up and down the street would congregate in the Wheel later at night and start talking about what they were going to do. And I think the whole change of the downtown area, that urban renewal that happened, really kind of got sparked inside the bar during that period of time because there was a lot of discussion.

In my time in Estes Park, I think the Lawn Lake Flood had more impact on this community than any other event. The downtown area looks so

incredibly transformed from what it looked like prior to that flood as a result of the urban renewal that took place. I think it was the little town that could, almost like The Little Engine that Could, that it took off in that period of time. They used that as a slogan and a logo to try and attract business back up to Estes Park after the flood. And as you look at the downtown area now and how gorgeous it is, and the street lights, the redevelopment . . . if you look at pictures back from the '70s, it didn't look like that at all—a completely different kind of feel. And it just uplifted the entire community and really, I think, rallied the community together for an extended period of time.

Betty Kilsdonk: During your time here, did you leave Estes Park for any significant period of time?

Craig Belshe: No, I lived here continuously. I went to graduate school in Fort Collins, but even at the period of time I went to graduate school, I just drove down and came back up. And before I became an administrator, I had a variety of summer jobs that I would work in the off season—when I was teaching. But I became an administrator in 1982 so I was only a teacher up here for six years so I worked other jobs during that period of time. Then I was also going to graduate school and completing that; but I never . . . as far as my residence, I never left Estes Park.

I actually thought I would always be here, In my long-term plan and my goals, I always thought I would be one of those people that would live in Estes Park and be here all summer long and then for a few months in the winter, get in my trailer or whatever and go somewhere else and get out of here for a couple of months in the winter.

When people talk about the weather in Estes Park—to me, I enjoyed most of the seasons in Estes Park. I didn't even mind the winter in Estes Park. When I didn't like Estes Park was the spring. I liked winter. I loved it when Hidden Valley was open up in the Park and my son learned to ski up at Hidden Valley and had great experiences working up at Hidden Valley. I can remember even taking kids from the school district up to learn to ski at Hidden Valley. And we would do a lot of outdoor activities in the Park and I really enjoyed winter.

Where I never really enjoyed Estes Park was you get around the period of time about March, and that March, April, May, when you're expecting some kind of spring or blooming or flowers or put some things out and, "Spring's coming," you really don't see it up here. It's just kind of a lull through that winter and a little bit windy during that period of time and then it became summer. So I guess in my aspect, I was always thinking that I'd live here and leave for a couple of months and then come back.

And who knows—maybe some day I'll return and do that as well.

Betty Kilsdonk: What was the biggest challenge for you in your job, in your career, in Estes Park as a teacher, as an administrator—at whatever point in your career?

Craig Belshe: I'd say that probably, in my administrative years most specifically, recruiting personnel was the biggest challenge. As I mentioned earlier, it became more and more difficult to recruit personnel. There were becoming more and more requirements related to trying to have people that were licensed in the appropriate area as far as teaching in the area that they're licensed to teach. And the district's done a tremendous job of staying on top of that but it is extremely difficult.

I can't tell you how many times in my last probably ten years as an administrator in Estes Park, where I would get to the top candidate after going through an exhaustive search and pool, and really feel confident that I had somebody we really wanted to bring on board, and a strong candidate, but after they looked at the housing market in Estes Park, they would turn it down.

I can remember a couple from Wyoming, a husband-and-wife couple—outstanding educators that we thought we were going to be able to bring them both here and one of them was going to be teaching at the high school and one at the middle school. And they'd actually verbally accepted the opportunity to come here and about a week after they'd accepted they were going to come to Estes Park, they came to me in my office and literally the wife was in tears and they wanted to move here so badly; they could not afford to move to Estes Park in the housing market. Coming from Wyoming where they were at, there was a sticker shock factor.

So I think probably the greatest challenge was trying to recruit the best candidates and the best teacher we could possibly get up here to work with our kids in the housing market as it existed. And we ended up, as I said earlier, having more and more people commute. And some extremely capable teachers, but it didn't have that same kind of feel where they were tied into the community and felt that commitment level. And going to every activity that happened at night . . . you started seeing less and less teachers go to a game or an activity or a play or a musical, just because they weren't here to see it.

Betty Kilsdonk: So you're no longer with the school district up here. As you look at it from a perspective of someone who's now living outside the community, what are your dreams and hopes for the school district up here?

Craig Belshe:

I really think the business of schools is really tied into relationships so strongly. So my hopes and dreams would be that the relationships develop, once again, on firm footing. For a long, long period of time, I think the relationships and the working relationships in the school district between the board of education, the superintendent, administration, teachers—that there was a real enjoyment of each other, our work with each other and a real respect for what was going on in the school district. And I think that that was eroded over a period of time.

So my hope would be that they would be able to establish those long-term relationships again, have long-term staff that made a commitment to the school district and are here for many years and really show that level of commitment to the students and children here. Because I think that having continuity improves the quality of education.

And quite frankly, if people are working in an environment they're very happy and satisfied working in, it permeates down to the kids. Kids can read it; they know it. You don't have to say it. Kids can read it—if they know that people are a little unhappy, they're unsettled, they're not happy with what they're doing, there's just that feeling that you get in your workplace. So I would hope that that would be able to be reestablished. Because I believe that was here for a long period of time.

And there's a tremendous amount of good things that are happening in the school district, but without that relationship factor, I just don't think it's the kind of environment you'd want to have for your children as far as going through schools; you'd want people to be very happy and satisfied with where they're at.

Betty Kilsdonk:

And what about for the town of Estes Park as a whole?

Craig Belshe:

For the town . . . my concerns for the town . . . the battle in the town for all these years have been related to the whole preservation of the small town feel and economic growth. And some of that has almost an environmental feel to it, about, "Are we damaging the environment?"

I always thought that Estes Park would be the perfect place to live because it was bounded. Estes could only grow so far. When you're pretty much surrounded by National Park and National Forest lands, it can only extend so far. So that was one of the real attractions that I saw to the community.

That's also become a little bit of a detriment because some people feel like that when they walked into heaven's gate and they're here, that they want to close the gate behind them and this is how we want to keep it forever.

And no place remains that way.

My greatest concerns for Estes Park really have to do with congestion; has to do with the number of people and the onslaught onto the town. I think it's been very good for the business community, very good as far as raising tax revenue, very good for the tax base for the town. The town services here in Estes Park are just sensational—better than anywhere that I've seen as far as the service to the community and the citizens. Because I think they have quite a tax base to work off and not that many residents they're supporting with it.

But I really believe that, long term, something needs to happen related to the congestion in the downtown area. And I know there's been a lot of talk over the years . . . I actually had a student, when I was the middle school principal, that went to the town and he had done an entire project and set, complete with a diorama, architectural drawings, and everything of how to close off Elkhorn Avenue for a section and have a pedestrian mall down in that area.

The business owners in town don't really want to see that because they think that'll have a negative impact on that traffic and people stopping in the community, and they think that people will constantly bypass Estes Park and just go up to Rocky Mountain National Park. But I think with the way it exists right now, and you can be here sometimes for a couple of months in the middle of the summer (you've driven in it yourself), that it's pretty tough to get through that downtown area, pretty tough to find parking. They're looking at alternatives right now as far as the parking situation, trying to bring people in, but I think in the long term, something needs to happen with the congestion in the community. Because people will stop coming because it's just too busy.

Betty Kilsdonk: Is there anything else that you'd like to tell me that I have not asked you?

Craig Belshe: I really enjoyed my time in Estes Park. I enjoyed the people . . . I would say as much as anything else since I've left, I miss the people as much as anything else. You live in an area that's so beautiful and what happens to you after a period of time is you take it for granted. When I come to Estes Park now, I don't take it for granted at all; I really take more time to look at the outdoors and look at what's happening around me. And to go into the Park and to take that hike and do those different kinds of things.

Over the years that I was here, I did hike extensively in the Park, but I found with each passing year, I was spending less and less time in the Park and, quite frankly, some of that was due to the number of people that were in the Park and the traffic and everything that you'd have to fight to get up

into the Park. And I know that they're doing some busing and some things out to Bear Lake now that are improving that status, or situation. But my idea of getting out into the wilderness wouldn't be to go to Bear Lake and sit around the lake with a thousand other people, or to walk up a trailhead with . . . like I'm in a pedestrian mall or I'm down on Elkhorn Avenue.

So I think that when I come back to Estes Park now, I really treat it with the true distinction that it should have. And when you live here, you kind of take it for granted after a period of time, and it just becomes something that's there. And you're busy with your own lives and your other professional obligations and things happening and you don't do those things that everybody travels from the United States to come here to do.

I have one interesting story—I was on a streetcar in San Francisco many years ago, and I was with my family; we were out there on a vacation. I was out there, actually, for a conference. And when I was on the streetcar, there was a gentleman that was on the streetcar, and he was in his 80s. And he had his cane around his arm and he was wearing a tweed hat, and . . . a real dapper-looking gentleman. And I had a T-shirt on that said Estes Park on it. And he looked at me, and he looked at me again, and he said, "Estes Park." He said, "Do you know where Estes Park is?" And I said, "Oh, I live in Estes Park." He said, "I've traveled almost the entire world and Estes Park's my favorite place to go."

And you hear that all the time. Even where I'm living now, in the Denver area, people say, "Oh, you're from Estes Park," and they say, "Oh, my gosh; I love Estes Park." So there's a flavor, a feel, here to Estes Park. And I think it's not just tied into the beauty and surroundings; it's the people that are here. So I loved my time here.

And like I said, maybe at some point in time, I'll be fortunate enough . . . my years when I finish working, may be I'll have the opportunity to come back up. But it's pretty expensive for retirees up here so I don't know if that'll happen or not. Most of my friends in the school district that retired have not stayed for that reason; economics ended up getting into situations that they could move somewhere else and live a lot less expensively on a retirement income than they could in Estes Park. And so even the teachers that I knew way back in the '70s that were here, very few have stayed and retired here.

Betty Kilsdonk: Thank you very much.

Craig Belshe: You're welcome; thank you.

Interview Ends

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